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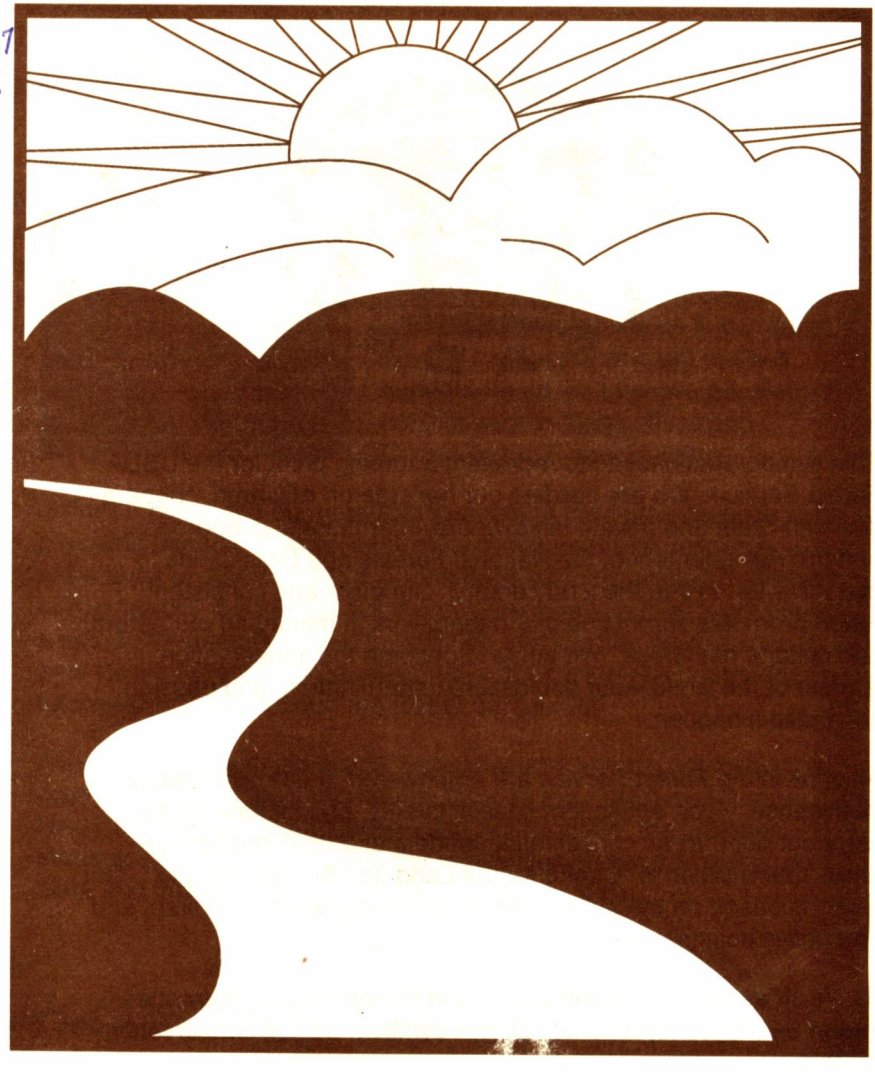
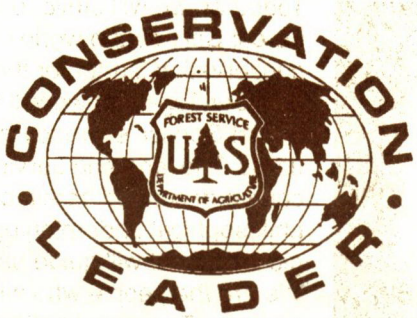
The Forest Service Ethics and Course to the Future



USDA Forest Service ■ Washington, DC
January 1996 FS-567

The Meaning Behind the Conservation Leader Symbol

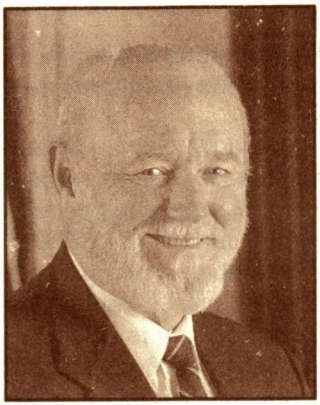


This symbol was chosen to represent a turning point for the USDA Forest Service. We are building our heritage on research, cooperation with State and private landowners, international cooperation, and the management of the National Forests and Grasslands to carry this vision into the 21st century. Our clear and consistent vision promotes commitment and teamwork in managing our natural and cultural resources. We strive to become the conservation leaders of the world—our dedication, determination, and passion can make it happen.

All of us in the Forest Service are empowered to use our wisdom, intelligence, vigor, education, special talents, and experience to carry out our part as conservation leaders of a land and service ethic. Our mission is "Caring for the Land and Serving People." Our vision is based on the philosophy of sustaining healthy, diverse, and productive ecosystems.

As we strive to be the world's best land stewardship agency, the Forest Service is represented by this symbol: we are conservation leaders.

Foreword



Together, we will strive to make the Forest Service the world's foremost conservation leader for the 21st Century. Together, we will raise the Forest Service's already high standards. The land and service ethics and course described herein clarify the philosophical underpinning and strategic focus that will guide us in our quest. We are the people who will make it happen. To do so, I believe our shared commitment to these ethics and Course to the Future is critical.

Gifford Pinchot and our predecessors meant the Forest Service to be a guiding beacon for excellence in land management, research, and assistance to others. Such is our heritage and our destiny. Fulfillment of that destiny is a continuous journey. On every journey there comes a time to evaluate how best to continue that journey. Now is such a time for the Forest Service. Attached is the outline of a course to our future—a first step toward the rest of our journey.

Forest Service budgets, plans, decisions, and actions will follow this course. We will amplify this course through the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act Program, the national strategic communication plan, the reinvention strategy, forest planning, and other policy statements.

Jack Ward Thomas

JACK WARD THOMAS
Chief

Ethics

The Forest Service draws passion and commitment to its mission from its land and service ethics.

Our land ethic is to:

> **Promote the sustainability of ecosystems by ensuring their health, diversity, and productivity.**

This ethic provides constancy of purpose and direction that permeates all we dream, do, and say. Our land ethic has evolved through the thinking and experiences of Forest Service pioneers such as Gifford Pinchot, Arthur Carhart, Bob Marshall, Aldo Leopold, and others. A growing understanding of the complexity of ecosystems has expanded thinking on sustainability—from emphasis on sustained yields of products to sustaining the ecosystems that provide a variety of benefits. Increased understanding of ecosystem function will demand rigorous research and continuing evolution in management concepts and actions.

Through ecosystem sustainability, present and future generations will reap the benefits that healthy, diverse, and productive ecosystems provide. Our ethic includes the active use of ecosystems, through both preservation and manipulation, to gain these benefits —so long as this use does not unduly impact ecosystem sustainability.

Our first priority is ensuring ecosystem health in order to provide the foundation for all life. Our concept of ecosystem health builds on Leopold's definition of land health as a state of vigorous self-renewal. We believe ecosystem health must incorporate resiliency, and diversity of composition, structure, and function. Biodiversity is the variety of life and includes the variety of genes, species, plant and animal communities, and the processes connecting them through space and time. As our understanding grows, we will collaborate with others to refine definitions of ecosystem health over time. Understanding what will keep ecosystems healthy and what it will take to restore degraded ecosystems challenges us all. We welcome that challenge.

Our service ethic is to:

Tell the truth, obey the law, work collaboratively, and use appropriate scientific information in caring for the land and serving people.

This service ethic couples with our land ethic to guide our work. Maintaining public trust requires living our service ethic while balancing responsiveness, representativeness, and efficiency.

The Forest Service was created by and for the people. Hence, we communicate with and listen to the public and their elected representatives. We consistently obey the law and tell the truth. Then, we work collaboratively to integrate science and public participation into management.

The Forest Service will be "of the people." We represent society by: (1) maintaining a workforce that reflects the diversity of the American public, (2) ensuring that this workforce includes the professional disciplines required to successfully execute ecosystem management, and (3) expanding our recognized public to include more segments of the population—and to also consider future generations.

The Forest Service will gain trust through our competence as we streamline and improve operations, eliminate inefficiencies, and develop and use new knowledge and technology. Scientific information used will include social as well as biological and physical sciences.

The Forest Service will strive for quality and excellence and maintain professional and ethical standards. We accept responsibility and accountability for our actions. The Forest Service will foster a management climate of mutual trust, respect, and shared leadership.

Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles

Our ethics provide the foundation, and our mission, vision, and guiding principles provide the framework for our actions. The phrase "Caring for the Land and Serving People" captures the spirit of our mission. We envision the Forest Service as an efficient, productive, multicultural, and multidisciplinary organization that is recognized for national and international leadership in natural resource conservation. The statement of our mission, vision, and guiding principles can be found at the end of this document.

Our Course to the Future

We live our land and service ethics and achieve our mission through the development and practice of ecosystem management. Ecosystem management is the means by which the Forest Service will achieve the goal of sustainability. Simply stated, ecosystem management means the integration of ecological, economic, and social factors in order to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment to best meet current and future needs. The National Forests and Grasslands will be managed as models of ecosystem management, and principles of ecosystem management will be carried forth in our international and domestic assistance programs.

The Course to the Future describes the management context and helps focus our priorities to provide sustainable benefits to the American people and to the world.

1 – Protect Ecosystems

2 – Restore Deteriorated Ecosystems

3 – Provide Multiple Benefits for People Within the Capabilities of Ecosystems

4 – Ensure Organizational Effectiveness

Descriptions follow, with examples of actions to be taken. For each action, performance measures to indicate success will be developed, and we, collectively and individually, will be accountable for our progress.

1 – Protect Ecosystems

The Forest Service will work to ensure the health and diversity of ecosystems while meeting people's needs. Special care for fragile or rare ecosystem components will be provided on National Forest System lands and encouraged on other lands.

The following examples illustrate possible management actions to protect ecosystems:

- Understanding the roles of fires, insects and disease, and drought cycles in shaping ecosystems, and bringing that understanding to bear in management.
- Developing and using measures of sustainability.
- Establishing and managing wetland and riparian conservation areas.
- Evaluating the effects of human use and habitation on the sustainability of ecosystems (in urban, suburban and rural settings) while supporting the quality of life in those ecosystems.

2 – Restore Deteriorated Ecosystems

The Forest Service will improve deteriorated ecosystems on National Forest System lands. Scientific understanding and technologies needed for effective restoration will be developed. Domestic and international assistance programs will encourage ecosystem restoration. These efforts will improve the likelihood that diversity, long-term sustainability, and future options are maintained.

The following examples illustrate possible management actions to restore ecosystems:

- Promoting the use of prescribed fires in ecosystems that evolved with a fire regime, through technology transfer, conservation education, and incentives.

- Restoring wetland and riparian conditions to protect water quality through the use of best management practices such as planting of desired vegetation, stream bank stabilization, and management of livestock use.

- Developing technologies needed to restore ecosystems and monitor effectiveness of restoration.

3 – Provide Multiple Benefits for People Within the Capabilities of Ecosystems

Within the limitations of maintaining ecosystem health and diversity, forests and rangelands must meet people's needs for uses, values, products, and services. Forest Service programs will focus on providing benefits to people from these lands, emphasizing those that National Forests and Grasslands have special advantages to provide. On other forests and rangelands, we will offer assistance to owners and managers to help fulfill their objectives in an ecologically sound manner.

The following examples illustrate possible management actions to provide multiple benefits within the capabilities of ecosystems:

- Providing water, recreation, timber, minerals, fish, wildlife, forage, wilderness, heritage, and esthetic values on the National Forests and Grasslands.

- Implementing Forest Service cooperative programs using an ecosystem management approach on non-Federal lands, domestically and internationally.

- Helping urban and rural communities to maintain, restore, and enhance the quality of ecosystems and to build capacity for meeting their needs in an environmentally sound manner.

- Promoting conservation of wood by developing and providing technologies to increase efficiency of its use, including recycling.

4 - Ensure Organizational Effectiveness

The Forest Service will improve organizational effectiveness by creating and maintaining an atmosphere where people are respected, trusted, and valued, and where expertise and professionalism are rewarded. Our workforce will be multicultural and multidisciplinary. Forest Service people will be empowered to carry out the agency's mission and be accountable for achieving negotiated objectives.

Listening to, learning about, and collaborating with the citizens of the United States—the owners of public land—is a continuous process. The agency will use appropriate scientific information in decisionmaking processes, and will involve diverse communities of interest in decisions. Partnerships and collaboration with an expanding array of groups will characterize Forest Service operations.

The following examples illustrate possible management actions to enhance organizational effectiveness:

- Achieving a workforce that reflects the full range of diversity of the American people. This includes cultural and disciplinary diversity, as well as diversity in skills and abilities.

- Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation of efforts to reach agency goals, including ecosystem health and sustainability.

- Expanding collaboration between researchers, scientists, and practitioners to better integrate science into agency policy considerations, decisions, applications, and practices.

- Establishing accountability as an integral part of defining all goals and evaluating actions, including achieving a diverse workforce.

Outcomes

The three primary outcomes of Forest Service actions will be healthy ecosystems, vital communities, and an effective multidisciplinary, multicultural organization.

Healthy ecosystems will result from wise resource management. Vital communities will reflect the human dimension of ecosystem management and our commitment to work collaboratively with communities. In vital communities, individuals and families will find comfort, security, connectedness, and other aspects of a high quality of life. Vitality of communities will have social, economic, and environmental dimensions. An effective organization will result from living our service ethic. Taken collectively, these outcomes will be the result of successfully pursuing our Course to the Future, and will contribute significantly to the well-being of our Nation and the world.

Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles

Mission

The phrase, "**CARING FOR THE LAND AND SERVING PEOPLE**," captures the spirit of our mission. As set forth in law, our mission is to achieve quality land management under the sustainable multiple-use management concept to meet the diverse needs of people.

It includes:

- Advocating a conservation ethic in promoting the health, productivity, diversity, and beauty of forests and associated lands.
- Listening to people and responding to their diverse needs in making decisions.
- Protecting and managing the National Forests and Grasslands so they best demonstrate the sustainable multiple-use management concept.
- Providing technical and financial assistance to State and private forest landowners, encouraging them to practice good stewardship and quality land management in meeting their specific objectives.
- Providing technical and financial assistance to cities and communities to improve their natural environment by planting trees and caring for their forests.
- Providing international technical assistance and scientific exchanges to sustain and enhance global resources and to encourage quality land management.
- Helping States and communities to wisely use the forests to promote rural economic development and a quality rural environment.

- Developing and providing scientific and technical knowledge aimed at improving our capability to protect, manage, and use forests and rangelands.

- Providing work, training, and education to the unemployed, underemployed, elderly, youth, and disadvantaged in pursuit of our mission.

Vision

- We are recognized nationally and internationally as a leader in caring for the land and serving people.

- We are a multicultural and diverse organization. Employees work in a caring and nurturing environment where leadership is shared. All employees are respected, accepted, and appreciated for their unique and important contribution to the mission. The work is interesting, challenging, rewarding, and fun—more than just a job!

- We are an efficient and productive organization that excels in achieving its mission. Responsibility and accountability for excellence in achieving our mission are shared by employees and partners. The American people can count on the Forest Service to perform.

Guiding Principles

To realize our mission and vision, we are guided by 13 principles:

- We use an ecological approach to the multiple-use management of the National Forests and Grasslands.
- We use the best scientific knowledge in making decisions, and select the most appropriate technologies in the management of resources.
- We are good neighbors who respect private property rights.
- We strive for quality and excellence in everything we do and are sensitive to the effects of our decisions on people and resources.
- We strive to meet the needs of our customers in fair, friendly, and open ways.
- We form partnerships to achieve shared goals.
- We promote grassroots participation in our decisions and activities.
- We value and trust one another and share leadership.
- We value a multicultural organization as essential to our success.
- We maintain high professional and ethical standards.
- We are responsible and accountable for what we do.
- We recognize and accept that some conflict is natural and we strive to deal with it professionally.
- We follow laws, regulations, executive direction, and congressional intent.

FS-567 was previously published as an administrative document for internal Forest Service distribution.

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